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EDUCATION

OVERCROWDING CRISIS HIGHLIGHTS EDUCATION WOES

80 children crammed into one Grade 1 classroom

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IN A STATEMENT of South Africa's education crisis, Comos City Junior Primary School is a microcosm of the challenges faced by the nation's schools.

An astonishing 80 children are crammed into a single Grade 1 classroom, a situation that has raised grave concerns about the quality of education that young learners receive.

As teachers grapple with the overwhelming task of providing meaningful instruction in such cramped conditions, the dreams of these vulnerable children risk being stifled.

This alarming situation unfolds against the backdrop of President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation Address on Thursday, where he outlined plans to improve the education system, emphasising the need for expanded access to early childhood development and a commitment to training more qualified teachers.

However, as classrooms overflow and resources dwindle, the urgent question remains: will these promises translate into real change for South Africa's children?

When the *Saturday Star* visited the school earlier this week, we counted around 80 children in the classroom we were shown, a number lower than the 92 reported by the DA following an oversight visit the day before.

The classroom was overcrowded, with learners' bags left outside to create space. Parents gathered outside the school, shared their suspicions that the school had been tipped off about the media visit and had likely made efforts to manage the situation, as conditions had been worse the day before.

Apart from overcrowding, the school

faces a shortage of furniture. Many learners do not have desks, and some teachers have to accommodate three learners at desks meant for two. Frustrated parents also expressed their dismay over the ongoing admission challenges, reporting that many of their children are still unplaced.

Katlego Segole shared her arduous journey in securing a spot for her child, revealing the complications she faced with the online application process.

"I applied for my child the first time when it opened. I then realised the very same day that the school I had applied to, did not have Africans, and my child is supposed to be doing Afrikaans, so I deleted my profile and then re-ited it. When I went back to check my online application, I realised they had given space in a school that I didn't apply for. I started enquiring about a change in November last year. I was given run-arounds until schools reopened."

Zoliswa Kave, another parent, expressed her heartbreak regarding her five-year-old son. Unwilling to send him to crèche again due to financial constraints, Kave wanted him to start Grade E at the same school as his brother. "My child is 5 years old, my husband is not working. It is me alone that is hustling. So I wanted him to do Grade E here, his brother is also here. Last year they told me that they are considering that his brother is here," she said, reflecting the mounting frustrations faced by many parents in the area. The inadequate facilities extend beyond overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of toilets. Parents have noted a severe lack of furniture, with many students forced to share desks or learn outdoors under trees due to the unavailability of adequate classroom space. Meanwhile, the DA, after undertaking

ing overnight inspections in Comos City, is placing pressure on education officials to respond effectively to the crisis.

The party is calling for immediate action, including the addition of mobile classrooms and essential resources to better support the burgeoning student population.

"We demand that the GDE take immediate action by providing additional mobile classrooms and essential resources to address the overcrowding crisis in our schools. We also urge the department to pursue a permanent solution to the inadequate facilities, ensuring learners have access to safe and conducive learning environments," said Sergio Lou Dos Santos, DA Gauteng Shadow MEC for Education.

Responding to the parents' grievances, Gauteng Department of Education spokesperson Steve Mabona acknowledged the overcrowding issue, stating: "We did indicate during the learner placement period that because of pressure experienced in certain areas, some schools will be overcrowded. We are establishing a satellite school in the said area, which will assist to alleviate pressure from the overcrowded school."

Mabona also addressed allegations of bribery regarding school admissions, inviting parents to provide evidence for investigation. The plight of South African schools is further heightened by recent incidents, such as the bullying case at Sutherland High School in Centurion, which went viral due to footage captured by the victim's mother. Such occurrences have led to increased public interest in the state of school safety, with the department vowing to monitor the situation closely and ensure all necessary support measures are executed thoroughly.

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URC DERRY

Bulls ready to silence Stormers home crowd

LIGHTNING ROOMMAN
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AS South Africa's fiercest rugby rivalry intensifies, the Bulls are gearing up to take on the Stormers in the highly anticipated United Rugby Championship (URC) derby at Cape Town's packed DHL Stadium this afternoon.

Tickets for the titanic clash are sold out, but the Bulls face a daunting challenge – they've never won a URC match at this venue.

NO SUPPORT

Dricus not a fan-favourite Down Under

ONGAMA GOWANE

DRICUS du Plessis, received a rude awakening that he is by no means the fan favourite as he was booed in the pre-fight press conference on Thursday and in the ceremonial weigh-in yesterday.

The 31-year-old heads into UFC 312 with a large number of South Africans not pleased with him having publicly shown his support for US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk, who in the past few weeks have attacked South Africa in interviews and on social media.

Stormers captain Salmaan Moerat said they are excited to be back in front of their "Faithful", as the Stormers supporters are known.

"We will be up for it and ready. As a professional, this is why you play the game. (U) At your home stadium, in front of your people."

The Stormers captain vowed they would be up for the challenge and not just bank on their supporters to give them energy.

Bulls director of rugby Jake White

and his team have other plans, though, reports Adriaan Mahomed.

"It's wonderful to know that rugby is still so important in Cape Town, and also so important when the Bulls come down here," he said.

"The more the Bulls players get used to playing in front of big crowds and big games, the better it is for us going forward," said White. "One with I have for the Bulls is that we play with the same amount of reward to the fixture we are getting from the supporters."

fighter and his team.

All his UFC career, Du Plessis has been known as probably the most untidy fighter in a promotion filled with the world's most technical and crisp strikers, wrestlers and grapplers.

As a result, the South African camp looks to use the Strickland fight to show that they too have the technical game required to compete at the highest level. The main card will get underway at 8pm SAST and includes another title bout as Zhang Weili defends her strawweight title against Tatiana Suarez.

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been focused
our designs
the line we
other types
orporate into
s a key role

his hometown in the Eastern Cape, while
his childhood friends, Rankwana and
Leburu, continue to live in Johannesburg.

Despite the distance, the three have
remained closely connected, working
together to bring Konto Khalo to life.

Mkonto said: "After we knew

they've set a little deadline: by the
end of the year, the business needs to
show signs of success, or I might have
to go 'find a real job!'" It's all in good
fun, though, and only fuels Mkonto's
determination to make Konto Khalo
a success.

PAGEANTRY

Young model embraces pageantry as a platform for change

ANITA NKONKI

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LUYANDA Mthembu, a young and
ambitious model, shares her inspir-
ing journey in pageantry and her
commitment to uplifting children
from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mthembu has secured her place
as a finalist in Miss Grand South
Africa 2025, and as she prepares
for the much-anticipated corona-
tion night on June 28 at Emperors
Palace, her focus is firmly set on
advocacy, empowerment, and com-
munity upliftment.

In a conversation with Saturday
Star, the 25-year-old shared her fer-
vent passion for pageantry and the
deeper mission behind it, which
she says extends far beyond merely
securing a title.

"My journey has been one of
resilience, passion, and a deep com-
mitment to uplifting others—espe-
cially the next generation," she said.

Mthembu captured her journey into pageantry from the tender age
of 11. Inspired initially by the reality show *Toddlers & Tiaras*, her interest
blossomed as she discovered the inspiring narratives portrayed in contests
like Miss South Africa.

A pivotal moment came during Rolene Strauss's iconic Top 5 interview,
where the former Miss South Africa emphasised becoming a beacon of
hope, a sentiment that sparked Mthembu's ambition to pursue pageantry.

"I knew then that this was something I wanted to pursue one day," she
recounted, reflecting on the profound impact of Strauss's words.

Her passion further intensified upon meeting Ntandoyenkosi Kunene,
Miss South Africa 2016, who visited Mthembu's high school, sharing her
tale and encouraging young girls to chase their dreams.

"Meeting her in person confirmed so much for me about the kind of
impact I want to have on others one day. Until that moment, pageantry had
felt out of reach, but suddenly, it felt possible. Even though I was hesitant
to take the leap, my mom, my biggest supporter—entered me, knowing
how much this dream meant to me. Now that I'm here, I'm embracing
every part of the journey with excitement and determination, ready to
grow through this incredible experience," she noted.

Her advocacy focuses primarily on protecting and uplifting children
from displaced and disadvantaged backgrounds.

"I am passionate about ensuring these children have access to the
resources, education, and opportunities they need to thrive," she explained.

Mthembu says aims to make a positive impact through community
outreach, mentorship, and raising awareness.

"It's about giving them the support and hope they need to succeed and
break free from the cycles of hardship they may face," she added.

Reflecting on her path to success, Mthembu attributes much of her
progress to her unwavering support system.

"I would attribute my success to my parents, who have always been
my biggest supporters, and to the teachers and mentors who've guided me
along the way," she expressed.



LUYANDA Mthembu is not just a hopeful
contender in pageantry; she is a beacon
of inspiration and change for many. I
Supplied

How and your toes show

SMILING at someone at the traffic
lights or saying please and thank you
should be easy and should come as
natural as breathing and here in our
country we do it pretty often and
way more than they do it in most
other parts of the world. Good job us.
Kindness, compassion and these little
gestures go such a long way.

Today I wanna tell you about
angels that fly among us with invis-
ible wings and superheroes who don't
wear capes (but totally should). If I did
five percent of what these blessings do
everyday I'd be wearing a cape adorned
with glitter and all the sparkles. Let's
talk about CHOC Childhood Cancer
Foundation especially because Flip
Flop Day is just around the corner.

In 1977 Sister Sadie Cutland and
her husband Julian's firstborn, Hillary
was diagnosed with aplastic anaemia
at the age of just seven years old.

A few years later Sadie decided to
form a support group composed of
parents and volunteers and CHOC was
formed in 1979 in Joburg. Thanks to
the Cutlands, the volunteers, parents
and all the supporters along the way
CHOC now supports over 1500 fami-
lies at any given time.

This foundation offers emotional
support to families, accommodation
for out-patients and their parents,
transport to and from treatment cen-
tres, financial bereavement support,
meals, care bags and so much more.
More importantly than all of the life
changing things I've already just men-
tioned they provide love, kindness,
cuddles and a whole lot of hope.

Hope changes everything. That and
knowing you're not alone. I have been
lucky enough to attend so many of the
launches and events throughout the
years and I've even cycled amongst
those crazy Cows to raise much needed
funds to keep it all going.

The crazy CHOC Cows wear their
outfits with pride and they deserve
a gigantic round of applause for the
antics they get up to. The CHOC staff
should wear neon capes day and night
so that we know who they are at all
times so we can give them high fives,
hugs and all the love.

Thank you to every single charity
worker and caregiver out there for
spreading love so unconditionally.

Let Flippie be your Valentine this
Friday the 14th. He could even be your
"solemate". All it's gonna cost you is
R10 so buy your sticker online or at
any Tekkie Town outlet and show off
your toesies and be solely committed!
Have a heart... Wear a sole! More info
at choc.org.za or flipflopday@choc.org.za

Top SA Tunes Of The Week

Charlie Finch: *Daydreams*
Annabelle: *Oh Rain*
Carmen Rodriguez: *Stay Ready*
Albino Beach: *Circa*
Tyla: *Push To Start*